

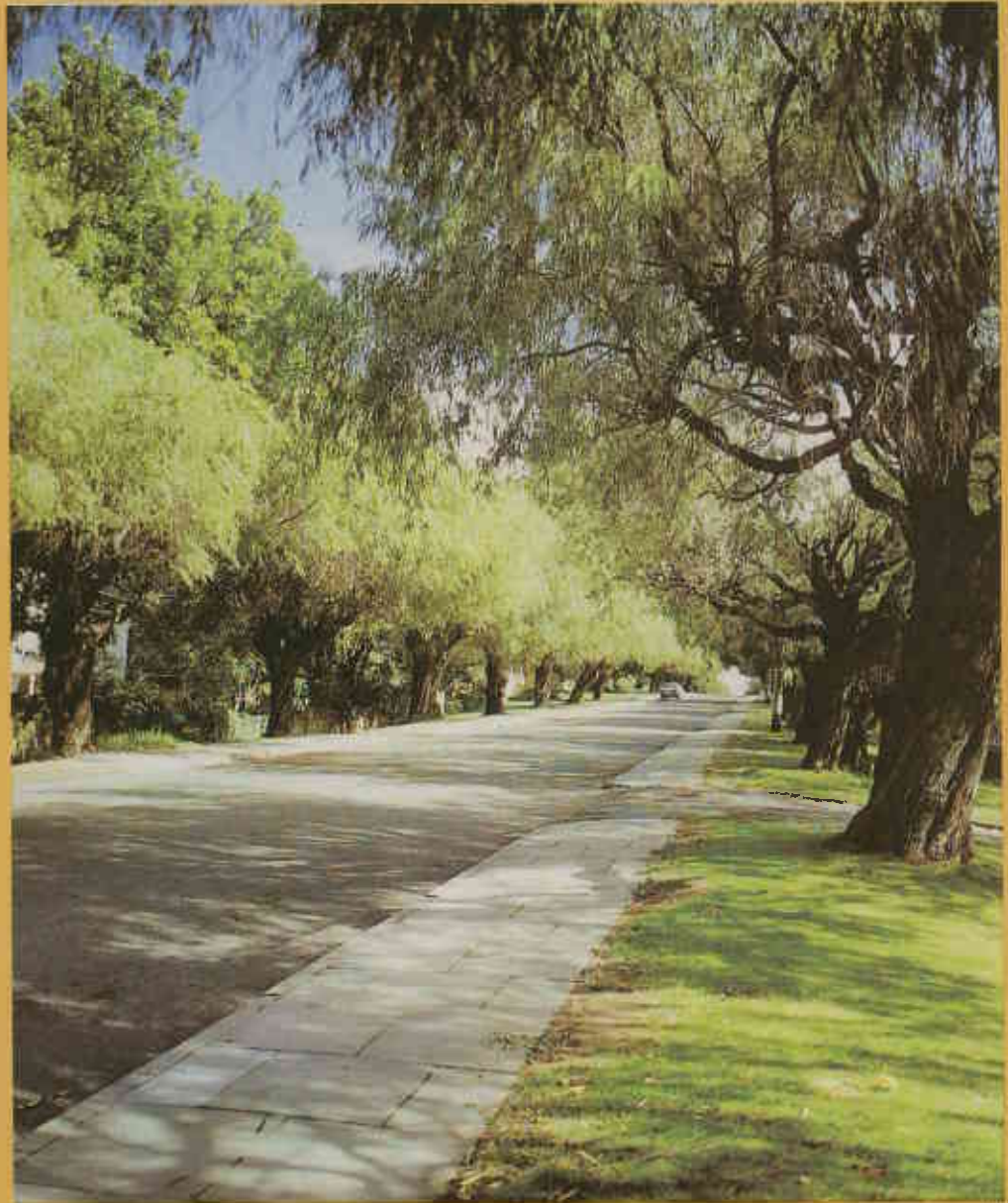
STREET TREES OF PERTH

by
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Why are some suburbs green and pleasant places, whereas others appear desolate? Trees can make the difference, but to be effective they must be large and frequent enough to exert a visual and environmental influence. "Urban Forestry" is the term used to encompass the theme of how the benefits of forests can be melded into city living. Its scope is very wide and can vary from the management of working commercial forests within metropolitan subdivisions down to what individual trees should be planted in a back yard. Street trees are but one aspect of this challenging subject.

Street trees must be special because they have to cope with a greater array of enemies than perhaps any other plant. Vandals can wreck them with minimum inconvenience. Pedestrians on one side and vehicular traffic on the other prune their crowns to bizarre shapes. Underground, water mains, telephone and power cables, and gas mains gnaw at their

Peppermint Grove, a suburb of Perth, was aptly named as peppermints grow naturally there. They have also been planted throughout the suburb as a street tree. Note that the trees on the left hand side have been pruned to avoid powerlines.





The brush box (*Tristania conferta*) is often given a box shape in Perth suburbs, on the side of the street that supports powerlines.

roots. Overhead powerlines restrict crown growth and have created the mushroom shaped street tree so familiar to urban dwellers. In recent years the street tree has been liberated somewhat by more developers choosing to put the powerlines underground. Thankfully the aesthetic benefits apparently out-weigh the extra costs, which must be borne by the purchaser of the block.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous trees planted in the streets of the Perth Metropolitan Area are brush box (*Tristania conferta* R. Br.) and Western Australian peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa* (Spreng) Schau.). Both have been used for some considerable time and continue to be planted, particularly in variegated and other special forms. Both are closely related to the eucalypts.

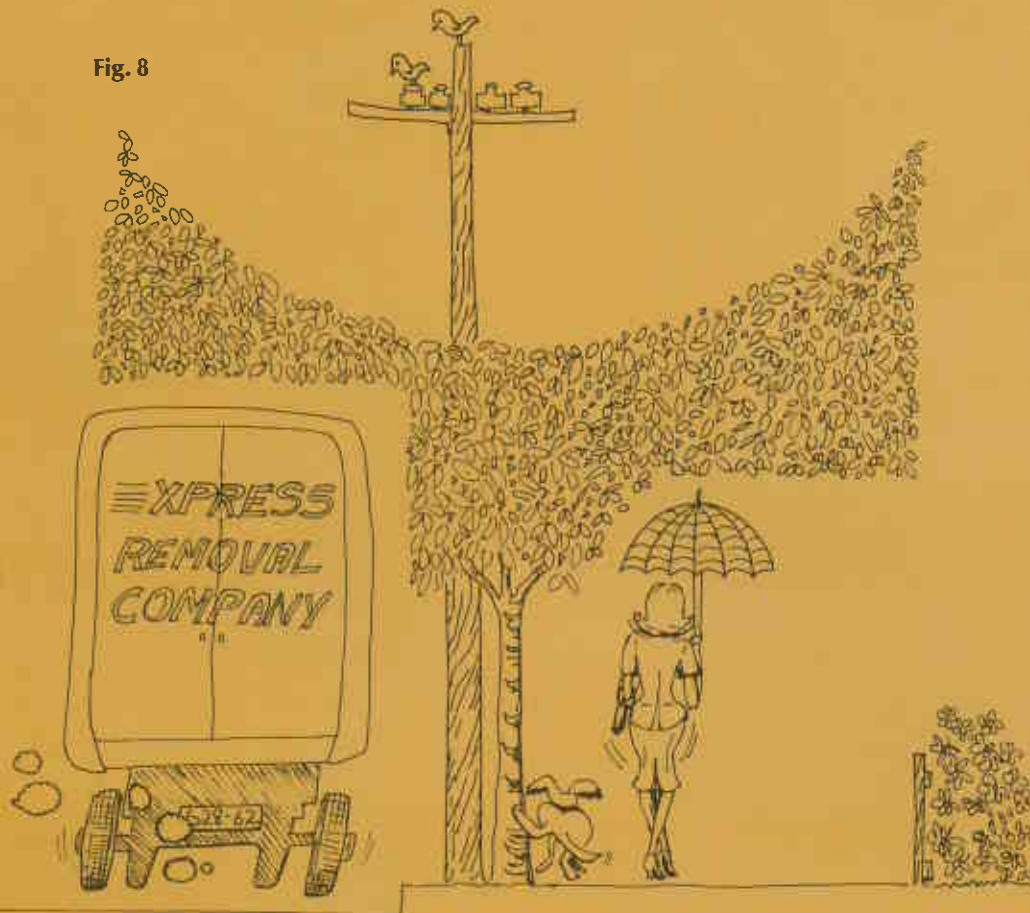
Brush box is native to Australia, though not to Western Australia. Its natural home is on the fringe of rainforest in northern New South Wales and Southern Queensland, where it grows to be a large girthed tree commonly over 40 metres in height. It is cut for timber, along with other associated species. There it enjoys wet tropical summer conditions, quite the opposite to the unremitting summer drought of Perth. Left to grow unpruned and unwatered brush box in Perth tends to be short (10 - 13 metres) and sometimes stag-headed.

Its remarkable capacity to withstand regular and severe pruning makes brush box a popular street tree with city authorities. The typical mushroom shape, created by pruning to avoid powerlines, is so familiar that many are surprised to find that it looks quite different when left to grow naturally. Its deep green leaves also cast a welcome dense shade, and the tree is generally free from disease.

Seaside campers and holiday makers know well the welcoming dappled shade cast in midsummer by the native peppermint. Geopraphe Bay, near Busselton, is probably the centre and peak of its natural occurrence, though it occurs along the coast as far north as Perth, and both inland and along the coast much further to the south. It is not surprising that quite early in our European history people sought to extend the comfort provided by its cool green leaves and the safe height of its branches to the surrounds of their houses and the verges of their suburban streets.

As with brush box, overhead powerlines have forced the typical mushroom shape on peppermint street trees. Likewise, peppermint has the fortunate capacity to thrive despite regular and heavy pruning. The graceful, semi-pendulous, well proportioned shape of the naturally grown tree contrasts with that imposed by the tyranny of overhead powerlines.

Fig. 8



The Ideal Street Tree?

Not quite! Further requirements: sheds no leaves, nuts, fruit, bark or flowers; produces no hayfever; harbours no insects or noxious fauna; requires no pruning or spraying; and grows no roots.